

To: Cooperating Teacher

If you want this year to work for both of you, then sit down before school starts and read this article together.

What Your Student Teacher Wants You to Know

“My student teaching was a nightmare. My master teacher never benefited from my skills and energy, and I ended the year with shattered confidence (although now I am a much-requested and valued sub.) If we had only communicated clearly, the experience would have been different. If we could do it all over again, here are some things I hope would not go unsaid.”

Five Things I Wish My Master Teacher Had Told Me

1. **Here’s what I expect of a student teacher.** My year of student teaching was like taking a test but not knowing the questions. I would have felt much more at ease if, right at the start of my placement, we had clarified together what subjects you expected me to take over and when: if you would like me to bring in my own materials or follow your plans; and even if you would like me to adopt your management style or try my own.
2. **Managing a classroom is a skill one can learn.** I had practiced teaching to my methods class in my college classroom but nobody was fighting, launching airplanes, or passing notes (although a few were asleep). I learned everything about teaching except how to control a group of kids and without control; a fantastic lesson has no chance. I wish we had made time early in the semester for you to share your management wisdom.
3. **Don’t become “friends” with the students.** I wish someone would have warned me: Some students love having another adult around that isn’t really their teacher. Someone to vent their problems to and confide in with playground secrets. I wish I had known that in the beginning it was most important for me to establish myself as a safe and impartial authority figure, eventually growing closer when the time was right.
4. **Mistakes are okay if you learn from them.** Being observed and evaluated scared me to death – I felt like an actor on opening night. But I finally figured out that unlike theater, student teaching has room for and a purpose for on stage slip-ups. As long as I could decipher what went wrong, mistakes led to grand improvements in lessons. I wish you could have reassured me about that from the beginning.
5. **Helps is available...seek it out!** Although I was not taking classes from them anymore, my education professors were still my professors and, therefore available to answer my questions and share their ideas. So were the other teachers in your school, as well as my fellow student teachers. The teaching profession needs to stick together and help its novices in all areas. I wish I had known that before I tried to go it alone.

Five Things I Wish I Could Have Told My Master Teacher

1. **Your attitude toward me has a major classroom effect.** You introduced me to the students as a teacher-in-training and then enlisted them as helpers in my training. This may work well in theory, but in practice, it was difficult to earn respect when I was seen in that light. Had I been portrayed as “another teacher” and had you saved your tip-giving for our private meetings, I would have felt much more confident when it was my turn to take over the class.
2. **Let me see your mistakes.** I often noticed you writing yourself notes after each lesson, making slight changes here and there. Why was this bounty of information for your eyes only? I wish you had been more open because not only would this have been educational for me, it would have also shown me that even experienced teachers are learning and growing every day.
3. **I need positive reinforcement.** “Did I do okay?” I wondered after every lesson, student interaction, and basic breath of air. I was constantly in the dark, not knowing if I had pulled off whatever it was I was attempting. You did indicate to me that no news is good news, but wow! Did it feel good when I actually heard the words, “Great job.” Just a little pat on the back was enough encouragement to send me rocketing through the rest of the day’s challenges.
4. **Let me learn about “the other part of teaching” too.** After our class was dismissed and we had our daily discussion, you went off to experience the other part of teaching. You met with colleagues, parents, the principal, and maybe the President for all I knew... and I never knew. Maybe you were protecting me, or perhaps you felt I wasn’t interested, but I really wanted to be included. The “other part” of teaching is a large part of being a professional educator, and I wanted to be prepared.
5. **Help me feel that we’re in this together.** One day my fellow student teachers and I reached the conclusion there were two kinds of master teachers. One kind saw it as their job to be our final testing ground to put us through tough paces and see if we had really learned our stuff. The other kind of master teacher proceeded as if master and student teacher were in it together, working as a team to better the profession. The student teachers lucky enough to be in the second sort of relationship went to school every day feeling eager and positive. They felt the same positive influence about their futures as teachers. I wish I had been one of them.

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